

# OXFORD ASIAN TEXTILE GROUP

Newsletter No. 3

February 1996

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## RADIOCARBON-14 DATES FOR INDIAN TRADE TEXTILES

The Department of Eastern Art in the Ashmolean Museum has a very important and large collection of Indian trade textiles, as many of you will know. They are part of the Newberry collection donated to the Museum in 1941; the more than 1200 textiles are mostly block-printed with resist or mordant and dyed in rich shades of blue and red. Fabrics of this kind were produced for the export trade to all parts of the Indian Ocean: our collection was acquired in Egypt. Most of the material is fragmentary, as the cloth had a utilitarian function as dress and domestic furnishing. It was used and reused until the fabric wore out -- most of the textiles seem to have come from the rubble heaps of Old Cairo (Fustat). Although merely fragments, though, the material is of great importance for the history of Indian textiles.

I have spent the last five years cataloguing this enormous collection, and have now completed a two-volume manuscript to be published by Oxford University Press (one for the catalogue, the other for a discussion of the material). As part of the historical evaluation of the collection, it was decided that a selection of textiles should be submitted for a radiocarbon analysis. Ever since this sort of material was first discussed in detail by the textile scholar Pfister in the 1930s, the fragments had been given a 13th to 15th century date on stylistic grounds. Recent archaeological finds at the Red Sea port Quseir al-Qadim supported these dates. It seemed especially timely now to build on this information, as well as to complement it with a carbon-14 analysis.

Two sets of samples were submitted to the Oxford Radiocarbon Accelerator Unit, where carbon-14 dating is carried out by accelerator mass spectrometry (AMS). As the test is very costly, only a small number could be chosen. The first set (dated in 1994) included ten samples, the second (dated in 1995) only six. Three observations can be made from the results.

First of all, the majority of the dated fragments confirm the dates previously suggested on stylistic grounds. They also complement the results gained from the archaeological evidence at Quseir al-Qadim, which so far has not been submitted to carbon-14 analysis. Secondly, two results (for Accession Nos. 1990.247 and 1990.320) push back the date for the trade in these textiles from India to Egypt into the 11th century. This was an extremely exciting result: my initial disbelief after the 1994 analysis was dispelled when the 1995 test confirmed the earlier result. The second sample (1990.320) was chosen because it is similar in design to the sample in the first series (1990.247).

Thirdly there is one result from the 1995 set of samples that will raise eyebrows and cause surprise. The last textile on the list (1995.61) is not part of the Newberry collection, but was exported from India to Indonesia. It was recently bought in Bali, but had been kept as an heirloom and ceremonial cloth by the Toraja of Sulawesi. The textile is not fragmentary, but is a complete and very large cloth. Its design shows small geese encircling rosettes, as well as other plant forms: an Indo-Egyptian fragment in the Newberry collection has the same pattern. The sample result of 1400 A.D. (+/- 40) is most astonishing: it has so far been assumed that no textile surviving in tropical Indonesia could have been earlier than the late 17th or early 18th century.

The list below provides only a skeleton; to make it come to life I will show the actual textiles tested at one of our events announced with this Newsletter. Please join me on Saturday 20th April at 11 a.m.

Ruth Barnes

Table 1: Textiles Dated in 1994

<u>Acc.No.</u>	<u>Radiocarbon Date</u>
1990.143	1335 A.D. +/- 50
1990.153	1525 A.D. +/- 50
1990.247	1010 A.D. +/- 55
1990.305	1255 A.D. +/- 50
1990.480	1690 A.D. +/- 90
1990.712	1595 A.D. +/- 50
1990.804	1460 A.D. +/- 70
1990.1033	1535 A.D. +/- 50
1990.1085	1555 A.D. +/- 55
1990.1123	1450 A.D. +/- 50

Table 2: Textiles Dated in 1995

<u>Acc.No.</u>	<u>Radiocarbon Date</u>
1990.136	1400 A.D. +/- 40
1990.320	1060 A.D. +/- 40
1990.404	1600 A.D. +/- 40
1990.361	1420 A.D. +/- 40
1990.950	1410 A.D. +/- 40
1995.61	1400 A.D. +/- 40

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**Our Two Events for Spring 1996: Please Come**

**Saturday 20th April at 11 a.m.  
Indian Block-Printed Textiles in Egypt:  
Radiocarbon-dating Results**

**Thursday 9th May at 1.15 p.m.  
Northern Song Silks  
Shelagh Vainker**

**20th April 1996:** This will be a study visit to see the actual textiles that have recently been carbon-dated. See p. 2 of this Newsletter.

**9th May 1996:** Shelagh Vainker will lecture on 11th Century textiles of the Northern Song Dynasty.

Both events will take place in the Eastern Art Seminar Room at the Ashmolean Museum, where numbers are strictly limited, so if you wish to attend please send your name to the secretary as below.

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**Membership Secretary**

Once again we have to announce that there has been a change of secretaries in the Department of Eastern Art: Marian Anderson left us in January to take up a part-time job, in order to have more time to concentrate on her course work in herbal medicine. We are very sorry to say good-bye.

The new secretary in the Department is Janet Partridge, and she has agreed to help with the administration of OATG. Any enquiries about membership or special events can be directed to her: Department of Eastern Art, Ashmolean Museum, Oxford OX1 2PH, Tel. (01865) 278067, Fax (01865) 278078.

## THE NEWBERRY EMBROIDERIES IN THE ASHMOLEAN MUSEUM

On December 2nd last year, under the guidance of Marianne Ellis, and with the kind assistance of Ruth Barnes, a small group of members were offered a rare insight into the splendid Newberry collection of Embroideries at the Ashmolean Museum. Within the space of two hours, more than fifty Fatimid and Mamluk embroideries were taken out of storage for close examination by the group. These pieces, variously datable between the tenth and the sixteenth centuries, ranged from tiny fragments to entire tunics, and they displayed an astounding range of embroidery techniques.

The study morning began with a series of expertly woven inscribed *tiraz* pieces, including two precisely datable examples of 932 and 907 A.D. Next a delightful series of patterned samplers were examined, some of them exquisitely fine. These displayed a wide range of embroidery techniques: fly, stem, back, split, herringbone, double running and Holbein stitches, as well as couching, needle-darning and white work. A number of the pulled, drawn and cutwork samplers bore witness to the remarkable degree of skill that must have been present within at least some of the workshops. One such sampler most helpfully incorporated an embroidered date of 1395, but most pieces in the Newberry Collection rely on stylistic, technical and circumstantial evidence for their dating.

The patterns on the samplers examined varied quite markedly: from pure, simple geometric motifs to almost Celtic-like interlacings to quite large-scale foliate, animal and even human- figure motifs. One textile displayed ogee shapes (topped by fleur-de-lys shaped caps) enclosing foliate motifs, and it is interesting that this particular type of design occurs in the eleventh to thirteenth centuries on both Islamic and Byzantine Mediterranean silks. The lion motifs of some Newberry Collection examples, as well as the eagle motifs on other pieces, also reflect earlier Eastern Mediterranean silk designs. The palmette and vine-leaf ornament apparent on yet other Newberry Collection fabrics reflect both earlier Eastern Mediterranean and thirteenth to fourteenth century Italian silk textile designs.

But perhaps most endearing of all was the astoundingly well preserved and most neatly tailored child's tunic. This, together with a group of charming hats (a number with matching pouches), and also the striped clothing samples, really brought home the fact that these were textiles actually used by real people so many centuries ago. How fortunate they were in their choice of cloths!

Most sincere thanks are due to all involved for such a truly enjoyable and enlightening morning,

Anna Muthesius

## EMBROIDERIES OF THE OTTOMAN EMPIRE

The exhibition *Ceyiz - Broderies de l'Empire Ottoman* (Geneva, 7th July 1995 - 12th May 1996) was arranged to coincide with the tenth International Congress of Turkish Art that took place in September 1995. The Turkish word *ceyiz* in its title means "bridal trousseau" and many of the embroideries are domestic textiles such as the pretty napkins and towels with decorative borders at both ends. These have been beautifully displayed so that the needlework, in silk and metal threads, can be seen clearly and the reversible stitch techniques fully appreciated.

Except for two velvets and a panel of brocade, the exhibits date from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. They are from many different parts of the Ottoman Empire, including Algeria, Syria, the Greek Islands and Eastern Anatolia. The characteristic that they have in common is the floral nature of the designs, which have been carried out in many different techniques and stitches. Two large hangings are particularly striking, one has large stylised carnation flowerheads arranged in staggered rows in reserve against a dark red stitched background and another is a prayer mat or hanging in the Turkish rococo style worked in tamboured chain stitch.

Of the forty-six exhibits, twelve are items of costume, and include a man's robe made for the Paris exhibition of 1889 that is richly decorated with *dival* gold embroidery. This is professional work requiring specialized training and equipment, but there are also examples of domestic work, notably the little *oya ignesi* needle-lace flowers made to trim the printed *yazma* kerchiefs. These can still be bought in Turkey to-day, without decoration, ready for the purchaser to add her own trimming around the edge.

Every piece is described and illustrated in a comprehensive catalogue (in French) but the cost is 40SF. However it is selling in the U.K. for £30, so could be considered a bargain! The chapter containing an analysis of metal threads is new research and will be very helpful to those trying to establish a chronology for these textiles.

Marianne Ellis

## ISLAMIC TEXTILE CONFERENCE AT THE ABEGG-STIFTUNG

As was mentioned in the last Newsletter, an international symposium on early Islamic textiles was held on 10th-11th November 1995 at the Abegg-Stiftung, Riggisberg near Bern, Switzerland. There were approximately 40 participants, fourteen of them delivering papers. The contributions will be published in the foundation's in-house publication, *Riggisberger Berichte*.

**EXHIBITIONS****PITT RIVERS MUSEUM, OXFORD**

*Embroideries from Islamic Journeys* - until 20th April

A "must" for those of you who have not already seen it. Intrigued by a Kohistani dress that she saw in a textile dealer's shop in London, Sheila Paine journeyed to Afghanistan and Kurdistan to discover more about its design. These embroideries were collected on those journeys, which she has written up in *The Afghan Amulet*, published by Penguin.

For further information phone 01865 270297

**BRITISH MUSEUM**

*Textiles of Highland Burma from the Ethnography Collections* - until 28th April

Burma is one of the most culturally diverse countries in South East Asia, and something of its diversity can be seen in this exhibition of distinctive textiles and jewellery that were made and used by minority groups of the Burmese highlands during the colonial period. Included are brilliantly embellished jackets, skirts, headcloths and shoulder bags of prestige and everyday dress.

For further information phone 0171-636 1555-8

**VICTORIA AND ALBERT MUSEUM**

*Fashion in China 1910-1970: Women's Dresses from the Valery Garrett Collection* - until 12th May

In the 20th century, the traditional robe of China evolved into the *cheong sam*. The display in the Costume Court, tracing its fashion changes, is complemented by contemporary European outfits from the Textile and Dress Collection inspired by this type of Chinese dress.

For further information phone 0171-938 8500

**SAFFRON WALDEN MUSEUM**

*Textiles of Imperial China* - until 24th March

This exhibition includes silk weaving and embroidery.

For further information phone 01799 510333

## OVERSEAS EXHIBITIONS

### ROTTERDAM, NETHERLANDS, MUSEUM FOR ETHNOLOGY

*Power and Gold* - until 19th May

Among the island cultures of South East Asia jewellery is not simply a matter of personal adornment but a major symbol of power, especially when it was made of gold. This exhibition features gold jewellery from Indonesia, Malaysia and the Philippines from the collection of the Barbier-Mueller Museum, Geneva.

For further information contact the museum at Willemskade 25, 3016 DM Rotterdam, Netherlands, tel. +31-10-4111055, fax. +31-10-4118331

### STUTTGART, LINDEN-MUSEUM

*Uzbekistan: Heirs to the Silk Road* - until 12th May

This is a major exhibition on Central Asia, from the early days of the Silk Road to the late 19th/early 20th century. Many textiles are on display, including four silk ikat coats from the Robert Shaw collection on loan from the Ashmolean Museum. There is also an extensive catalogue (see Publications below).

For further information contact the museum at Hegelplatz 1, 70174 Stuttgart, Germany, Tel. -711 1231242, Fax -711 297047

## COLOGNE MUSEUM REOPENS

The Museum of East Asian Art in Cologne has opened again after a conversion and extension phase that lasted nearly three years. The Museum is Germany's oldest special museum for the arts of China, Korea and Japan, having first opened in 1913. The first building was destroyed in the Second World War and it was not until 1977 that the new building, designed by the Japanese architect, Kunio Maekawa, was completed. The building was integrated into a landscaped hillside, and the recent extension has been designed to harmonize with the original.

The collections cover all branches of Far Eastern art, with focuses on Chinese ritual bronzes of the Shang period (1700-1050 B.C.), Japanese Buddhist wooden sculpture and painting of the 9th to 18th centuries, Korean ceramics of the Koryo dynasty (10th - 14th centuries), Japanese screens, and lacquerware of all three countries.

For further information contact the museum at Universitatstr. 100, 50674 Koln, Germany, tel. +49-221 9405180, fax. +49-221 407290

## LECTURES

## OXFORDSHIRE BASKETRY FRIENDS

Thursday 7th March at 7.30 p.m. - *Basketing in Bali*, Felicity Wood, at 2 Frenchay Road, Oxford. Visitors welcome, £2.

For further information phone 01865 248576

## VICTORIA AND ALBERT MUSEUM

The following gallery talks will take place at 2.30 p.m.:

Thursday 22nd February - *Ottoman Silks*, Patricia Baker

Wednesday 28th February - *Fashion in China, 1910-1970*, Andrew Bolton

Thursday 29th February - *The Dragon Robes*, Patricia Baker

Thursday 11th April - *A Carpet of Spring and Paradise*, Eileen Graham

During an evening opening on 1st May, 6.30-9.30 p.m., William Robinson, Director of Christie's will lecture on *Magic Carpets*, the history of Persian carpets in the West.

For further information phone 0171-938 8500

## NORTHERN SOCIETY OF COSTUME AND TEXTILES

6th July - *The Importance of Indian Fabrics and their Influence on Western Dress*, Imogen Stewart.

For further information phone J. Wyles, 01294 407707

## OTHER EVENTS

## THE COSTUME SOCIETY

Saturday 11th May - *An Indian Afternoon* at which Natalie Rothstein's research since her visit to India will be discussed. At the Victoria and Albert Museum.

28th December 1996 - 20th January 1997, *A Textile Tour to India*, which will include visits to Delhi, Jaipur, Agra and the Taj Mahal, the ikats of Orissa and Andhra Pradesh. Group minimum 20. £2500, single supplement £375.

For further information contact Bridget Marrow, 77 Compayne Gardens, London, NW6 3RT



## PUBLICATIONS

Fraser-Lu, Sylvia: *Burmese Crafts. Past and Present*. Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press (1994), 371 pp, hardback, ISBN 0-19-588608-9.

A comprehensive survey of the arts and crafts of Burma, including a historical survey of temples, pagodas, and wooden architecture, and extending to textiles, lacquer work, and basketry. The author has also written a survey of South-East Asian textiles, published by Oxford University Press (Singapore) in 1988.

As it happens, the following four publications all cover various cultures of eastern Indonesia:

Hamilton, Roy W. (ed.): *Gift of the Cotton Maiden. Textiles of Flores and the Solor Islands*. Los Angeles, Fowler Museum of Cultural History, University of California at Los Angeles (1994), 288 pp, soft cover, ISBN 0-930741-38-2.

An important publication for anyone interested in Indonesian textiles, including regional surveys and case studies by scholars who have done extensive field research in the area. To order write to: Fowler Museum of Cultural History, University of California Los Angeles, 405 Hilgard Avenue, Los Angeles, California 90024.

Jacobson, Mark Ivan and Ruth Marie Yeager: *Traditional Textiles of West Timor: Regional Variations in Historical Perspective*. Jacksonville, Illinois, Batuan Biru Productions (1995), 178 pp, soft cover, ISBN 0-9635296-0-9. To order write to the authors: 112 N. Lemans, Lafayette, LA 70503, U.S.A.

Jonge, Nico de and Toos van Dijk: *Forgotten Islands of Indonesia. The Art and Culture of the Southeast Moluccas*. Leiden, Rijksmuseum voor Volkenkunde and Periplus Editions, Singapore (1995), 159 pp, hardback, ISBN 962-593-015-9.

A magnificent publication, both to look at and to read, based on the authors' field research and work on museum collections. Published in connection with an exhibition at the Rijksmuseum voor Volkenkunde in Leiden. To order contact: Art in Print, Zuidereinde 52A, 1243 KH 's-Graveland, The Netherlands.

By the same authors: *Tanimbar. The unique Moluccan photographs of Petrus Drabbe*. Also by Periplus Editions (1995), 55 ills., text, soft cover, ISBN 90-5450-003-4. The 55 black-and-white photographs were taken by Drabbe c. 1930, when he was a missionary in the southern Moluccas. They are wonderful to look at for their own sake, as they allow an unusual glimpse into the past, but they also are of particular interest to anyone who wants to see textiles in use.

Kalter, Johannes and Margareta Pavaloi: *Erben der Seidenstrasse. Usbekistan*. Stuttgart and London: edition hansjorg mayer (1995), 368 pp, soft cover, [no ISBN given]. This is the catalogue to accompany the exhibition mentioned above. It is very extensively illustrated, most of it in colour, and has a comprehensive text (in German). To order: write to Linden-Museum, Hegelplatz 1, 70174 Stuttgart, Germany, Fax. -711-297047.

Also available from the Linden-Museum:

Kreisel, Gerd et al.: *Rajasthan. Land der Konige*. Stuttgart: Linden-Museum (1995), 320 pp, soft cover, ISBN 3-931182-04-5.

This is the catalogue of a Rajasthan exhibition that was on show at the Museum last year. It is not specifically about textiles, but they are discussed in the cultural context (also in German). To order: see previous title. The catalogues published by the Linden-Museum all are extremely good value; they tend to be reasonably priced, well illustrated and carefully researched, with good bibliographies. You need to be able to read German!

### **NEW GALLERY OF CENTRAL ASIAN TEXTILES**

Omar Masom has recently opened his Turkmen Gallery at 8 Eccleston Street, London SW1W 9LT, (Tel/fax 0171-730 8848). Omar is a Turkmen born in Afghanistan, and it is his aim to run his gallery on an educational as well as a commercial basis as a centre to promote the arts and handicrafts of Central Asia. A Turkmen yurt with its original decorative hangings takes pride of place in the gallery.

During 1996 it is planned to hold two important part-selling exhibitions, the first being of ikat textiles, including chapans (coats), hangings and hats, from Uzbekistan and northern Afghanistan. This will be your chance to study the different designs and colours of silk and cotton tie-dyed and hand woven ikats.

The second exhibition will be of Turkmen weaving - carpets, kelims, saddlebags, tent hangings and old costumes - as well as silver jewellery from all parts of Central Asia but especially Turkmenistan. There will also be many reproduction pieces of traditional Turkmen wool pile carpet weaving made by Turkmen displaced by the Afghan war and now living in Peshawar, Pakistan.

### **O.A.T.G. NEWSLETTER**

The Editor would like to include information about other societies and organizations that are likely to be of interest to members. If you are a member of, or have contact with, any such, would you please send her a brief paragraph describing its activities and including the name and address of the secretary. These will be included in the next few issues as space permits.

Please send these, as well as articles and news items to Phyllis Nye,  
Hewel Barn, Common Road, BECKLEY, Oxon, OX3 9UR  
Tel/Fax 01865 351607

**DEADLINE FOR NEXT ISSUE; MONDAY 13th MAY 1996**